

~~12330~~ ~~12331~~
12331
CONSIDERATIONS

ON ESTABLISHING A

C O L L E G E

FOR

O L D M A I D S

IN

I R E L A N D.

Homo sum : humani nihil à me alienum puto.

TERENTI

All human weal and wo learn thou to make thine own.

BEATTIE

D U B L I N :

PRINTED.

M.D.CC.XC.

How happy is the blameless vestal's lot!
The world forgetting, by the world forgot.

POPE.



ADVERTISEMENT.

TO this little Essay the author foresees some objections, which he shall here anticipate and endeavour to remove.

The term, Old Maid, will probably be censured as a term of derision, and turn the serious reader away in disgust. This term he could have easily changed; but in doing so, he should have been led into circumlocution. Besides he cannot see any good reason for holding the character of

an Old Maid in contempt ; he rather thinks it a character to esteem and wonder at, when we know that those by whom it is borne have passed, without reproach, through the prime of life ; an age in which female virtue is beset with passions and seducers. Ariosto, who is generally allowed to have been a penetrating observer of the fair, sensible of the danger that awaited the honor of his lovely heroine whilst in a state of celibacy, thought it necessary, for the protection of her chastity, to furnish her with a magic ring, which rendered her invisible in the moment of peril, With the beauteous daughters of this favoured isle, the majesty of virtue supplies the absence of the poet's ring.

It will probably be said too, that the author is labouring to revive the Romish Convent in Ireland.

He

He had no such object in view, though he has freely borrowed some hints from its constitution. Yet he will confess he should not be sorry to see the Convent arise again, bereft of all the restrictions of bigotry and superstition. It was demolished, at least in the British dominions, rather by the hand of rapine than reformation, and should have been spared, in gratitude, for the benefits to the community which it formerly produced under the mild influence of the Gospel. But we must now sigh in vain over its ruins, and fondly regret, that when the spoiler approached, the pale of the established church was not drawn around it.

If, by endeavouring to provide a retreat for such females as are averse from matrimony, or who, under certain circumstances, deem it inexpedient to change their situations in life, the
author

author should be considered as an enemy to that holy ordinance, injustice will be rendered him. No man can have a more profound reverence for the Divine institutes than he has ; nor approve more sincerely of the sacred union of the sexes. And it will be found on inspecting his plan, that he does not attempt to lure the unwary young female into perpetual celibacy ; nay, it will appear, that he does not exclude Love from the College he is projecting ; he only means that the wily god should not be permitted to light unhallowed fires within its walls.

Having thus, he trusts, removed those fancied objections, the Author, without a further attempt to deprecate the severity of Criticism, will submit his plan, with all due deference, to the Public.

D U B L I N,

M.D.CC.XC.

CON-

CONSIDERATIONS, &c.

FORMED for society, solitary seclusion is never the object of our voluntary choice, while unbiassed reason is permitted to regulate our conduct. †Ascetics, it is true, may be found in all ages, but they have always been either driven from the haunts of men, by the angry voice

† Balzac observes, with humour and truth, that, "la solitude est certainement une belle chose; mais il y a plaisir d'avoir quelqu'un qui sache répondre; à qui on puisse dire de tems en tems, que la solitude est une belle chose."

voice of offended conscience, or seduced by the flattering spirit of enthusiasm. Besides, poor dependant beings as we are, we require the mutual aid of each other. How deplorable then is the condition of an OLD MAID ! Stripped, perhaps, by death of her relations, and abandoned by the friends of her youth, she pines in solitude : a prey to infirmity, or bending beneath the weight of years, she sits, cheerless, the solitary tenant of an humble habitation. No lisping babe gambols at her knee ; no smiling friend appears to pour balm on her lacerated mind. Denied the pleasures of society, incapable, it may be, of employing her needle, and unused to habits of study, time passes her with a tardy step. And when death advances to her relief, his sting is sharpened by the reflection, that her eyes will not be closed, nor her limbs decently laid, by the hand of friendship or consanguinity.

This

This picture is not less faithful than it is melancholy. To relieve the miseries it exhibits, is the object of these pages.

To remedy the evil which i now deplore, i have revolved several plans in my mind; but the only one, which, on mature deliberation, has appeared to me eligible, is the instituting,

A COLLEGE FOR OLD MAIDS

of moderate fortunes; thus forming them into a sisterhood, and supplying them with all the comforts and advantages of society§. Lest

A 3

this

§ While this essay was in the printer's hands, the following article of intelligence appeared in the DUBLIN CHRONICLE, for Saturday, January 23d, 1790:—"Died lately at Lancaster, Mrs. Anne Gillison, a maiden lady, aged seventy-two. She has left 1600l. to build and endow houses for eight distressed Old Maids." I am induced to notice this act of charitable commiseration, as it serves to countenance the part i am taking in behalf of that class of my unmarried countrywomen, who are verging to the vale of years. Nor can i, in justice, omit to observe, at the same time, that it is an act deserving a distinguished place in the annals of benevolence.

this plan should hastily be deemed Utopian, i must beg the attention of the reader, whilst i endeavour to show its feasibility,—provided Parliament will afford its aid.

Let a fund for this purpose be raised by means of a capitation tax on the females of every family in the kingdom, above the rank of peasants and working artificers. The money thus collected, to be partly employed in purchasing a certain quantity of ground in each of the four provinces, in a situation to which nature has been prodigal of her charms, and in the vicinity of a market-town. Here let a spacious building be erected, with a cloister, chapel, refectory, dormitory, and all the suitable offices, according to a plan that will admit of occasional additions in harmony with the whole.

The

The legislature having thus performed its part, let the ladies who shall avail themselves of its bounty, contribute to the support of the institution ; each lady sinking irretrievably in the general fund, at least two hundred pounds of her fortune.

For

For the immediate government of such an institution, i would recommend the following concise code of constitutional laws:—

THE patronage to be vested in a committee of twelve ladies, selected by Parliament from the principal nobility of the kingdom; and the power of nominating the treasurer, secretary, and other officers, to be lodged in their hands.

The name of each candidate, with her place of abode and connexions, to be delivered in writing and properly vouched, to the committee; and a month to be allowed to consider her claim.

No candidate to be admitted without the written order of, at least, six of the committee.

Each candidate to deposit two hundred pounds in the hands of the treasurer on admission; and at the same time, to sign a solemn

lemn promise of a strict observance of the domestic rules of the college—binding herself to pay a stipulated fine for each offence against those rules, or patiently submit to expulsion.

No lady to apply for admission, whose character is not irreproachable, and who has not reached the fortieth year of her age.

The members to be at liberty to withdraw whenever they may deem it agreeable or expedient; for it is not intended that these celebrated words of the Italian poet should be inscribed over the portal:

“ Lasciate ogni speranza, voi che'ntrate.”

WITH respect to the Domestic Police of the college, i will only offer a few hints; to form a proper code of rules must be left to the wisdom of the committee.

A Principal or Prioress should be elected annually by the committee, from the sisterhood,

hood, and implicit obedience to her orders be required from each member; an appeal, however, to be open against her before the committee, in case of an abuse of power.

A select committee of six to be chosen from the sisterhood by the patronesses, to assist the prioress, and to audit the accounts of the college.

The whole sisterhood to breakfast and dine in common in the refectory, except when incapacitated by age or sickness from quitting their apartments.

Neither evening tea nor supper to be considered as established meals.

A salary to be allowed the nearest clergyman of the established church*, for officiating every
sunday

* It will be naturally inferred from this proposed regulation, that i am only providing a retreat for Old Maids of the
established

sunday and festival day in the chapel of the college. And the evening and the morning service to be read in the chapel every other day, by one of the sisterhood.

Besides a butler, porter, cook and the several officers of the kitchen, there should be a certain number of chambermaids; and this number to be in the proportion of one maid to three members. Each member, however, to be allowed a maid to attend on her own person, on the condition of her contributing 10% annually to the funds.

To encrease the comforts of the institution, and to give the sisterhood an opportunity of enjoying that degree of exercise which is indispensably necessary for the preservation of health, a number of horses and carriages should
be

established church. It is true they are my chief care. But i do not wish to exclude any sect from the college, of which i am now sketching the outline. Let the spirit of toleration throw open the gates.

be provided, according to the ability of the funds, and resolution of the committee, together with the necessary attendants.

A certain proportion of the annual income, or a subscription raised amongst the members, to be appropriated each year, for the purchase of books for the library ; but no books to be purchased or received as donations, without the approbation of the domestic committee.

No visitors to be received before nine o'clock in the morning, or after three o'clock in the afternoon ; nor before six o'clock in the evening, or after nine o'clock at night. The gates to be closed at ten o'clock precisely every night, and the keys to be deposited with the Prioress.

In designing the building it should be observed, that there ought to be a number of
par-

parlours proportionate to the number of bed chambers ; also, a music room, and a common sitting-room. This room should be of considerable extent, and fitted up for the library.

An institution thus constituted, besides meeting the proposed object, must be productive of many other advantages. Here declining age might find a soft pillow whereon to rest her head. Here unprotected females might pass down the stream of life without apprehension of awaiting dangers. Here, in the absence of care, and the silence of solitude, Fancy might produce bright effusions, and valuable accessions be occasionally made to the stock of polite literature : for within this pale of female virtue—a Carter—a Montague—a Moore—a Wil-

Williams—a Brooke—or a Seward—might arise. And here the arts of elegant ingenuity might be cultivated with safety and success.

But these are not the only advantages that would result from such an institution. It would afford a sure and comfortable asylum for those Old Maids, whose slender stipend should be reduced to a scanty pittance by the reduction of the national interest, whenever Parliament shall deem such a measure expedient. And, further, by opening a rich, though distant prospect of sublunary happiness to the young female, it would serve, in some degree, to defeat the dark arts of base seducers; and an old age of neglect would no longer, by its visionary terrors, precipitate the timorous virgin into the indissoluble bands of matrimony.

But though i have thus briefly, and i trust, clearly shown the many benefits which must result
from

from the instituting A COLLEGE for OLD MAIDS, i have not the vanity to think that my feeble voice, issuing from the shades of obscurity, will be honoured with the attention of my countrymen. I shall not then solicit it further. But i entreat that the Senate of this Nation,—to whom this plan is particularly addressed,—will turn their eyes to a spectacle now at their bar.—

——Behold a trembling group of amiable females ! Examine them narrowly, and perhaps you will find an aunt, a sister, or a niece amongst them. See ! they kneel, and present to you, with downcast eyes and melancholy countenances, a petition which contains the substance of these pages. Do not disregard it; nor avert your eyes from the lovely suppliants. Approach and raise them. And with philanthropy beaming from your brows, address them in words to this effect:——‘ Be comforted. We
‘ are

' are sensible of your grievances, and will re-
 ' dress them in the manner you desire. We
 ' confess we have too long lavished the wealth
 ' of the nation in erecting sumptuous edifices,
 ' and in creating establishments for the com-
 ' fort, advantage and convenience of our own
 ' sex, while we have ungratefully neglected
 ' yours, to whom we are not only indebted for
 ' our existence, but for the few sweets which
 ' are mingled in the bitter cup we received from
 ' our first parents. We eagerly embrace the
 ' opportunity which now offers itself of com-
 ' pensating for our neglect and ingratitude.
 ' We owe you too some reparation for the mi-
 ' sery we have induced on many of your sex.
 ' But you have hastened the day of retribution.
 ' —Retire in full confidence that your prayer
 ' has been propitiously heard.'

POST-

POSTSCRIPT.

IN order to spread wider the basis of benevolence on which i mean the college i have designed, should be erected; it has occurred to me that the sisterhood, in emulation of the Order of, The Daughters of the Holy Virgin †, might employ some of their leisure hours agreeably and profitably in teaching

“ the young idea how to shoot.”

The

† This order was instituted at Cremona, in the year 1612, chiefly for the benevolent purpose alluded to in the text.

The wisdom of our legislature long since provided a reputable mode of bestowing a liberal education on the sons of such parents, respectably situated in life, as could not afford to place their children in a public school, or under the tuition of private masters ; but it overlooked the daughters of parents so circumstanced. Now, if a small seminary for girls on a confined plan of a Free School, was united with the COLLEGE for OLD MAIDS, the sisterhood, at least such of them as were properly qualified, might take in rotation the education of the pupils ; and thus while they were occupying their leisure, render an essential service to the community. I do not, however, mean that this seminary should be a burthen upon the funds of the college raised by the subscriptions of the sisterhood, but be provided for by the bounty of Parliament. Nor would i have the girls thus educated be considered as deriving this benefit from charity ; but be received

ceived in society on the same respectable footing with boys who had obtained their education on the foundation of a Free School.

I cannot conclude this postscript without observing, that in the comprehensive *Plan of an improved system of Education in Ireland*, so boldly and ably conceived by Mr. Orde, girls are but once mentioned, and that slightly and incidentally, as if their education was considered as an object undeserving the notice or attention of the legislature.

THE END.

...in respect to the ...
...with ...
...of a ...

I cannot conclude ...
...in the ...
...in ...
...by ...
...and ...
...and ...



BRITISH MUSEUM

